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ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY MODEL FOR TRAINING IN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

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Abstract

The Central Queensland Emotional and Social Well-Being Regional Centre, located in Rockhampton, Central Queensland was established in July 2001 after a long process of discussions, consultation, negotiation and planning within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. This process involved numerous stakeholders, including community based organisations, government departments and agencies. The stakeholders developed a Community Consultative Group (CCG) and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The CCG and the MOU ensure that there is a framework for which all stakeholders and the community can collectively work to meet the emotional and social well-being needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as determined by us. The model established in Central Queensland by us as a community is now being explored by other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Introduction

Until the last 10 years or so, little work was undertaken nationally, within the State that we live in, Queensland or regionally with Central Queensland in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health or as it is now termed Social and Emotional Well-Being or Social, Emotional and Spiritual Well-Being by others.

We know that there was the National Aboriginal Mental Health Conference in 1993. That was attended by over 900 delegates. This was followed by the Ways Forward Report in 1995, workshops which resulted in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Emotional and Social Well-Being (Mental Health) Action Plan. This plan became a key document on Indigenous mental health for the Australian Government. It was from Ways Forward, the National Action Plan and other papers that we witnessed the formal pushing for Regional Centres for Social and Emotional Well-Being. It is about the Central Queensland Regional Training Centre for Social and Emotional Well-Being about which we speak today. We will explain a little of the history behind the Centre and then go on to give you an overview of the Centre and its proposed activities.

Historical Background

In 1999, the Bidjerdii Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Corporation Community Health Service Central Queensland Region was approached by the Australian Government to submit a proposal for funding. At that time the Board of Management needed to seek clarification on what were the centres about, what did they do, did the community want such a centre, how would it operate, did it fit under the Constitution of the organisation to pursue such a centre, where would it be based and many other questions. Bidjerdii had additionally been through some very quick development and major changes since its establishment in 1995. There seemed not enough time to explore the issues and the Board of Management made the decision not to pursue a Centre at that time.

A year later Bidjerdii was approached again and the decision was made to explore the issue further. At this point Bidjerdii was stronger as an organisation and had explored some of the questions it had the year before about such a centre, community members were talked, interested and supportive of Bidjerdii pursuing the concept. Bronwyn Fredericks worked on preparing the submission in cooperation with Bidjerdii staff and community members. Contact was made with the other Centres throughout Australia. It was difficult getting the submission done within the one month time frame but it went to Canberra and was successful at getting Bidjerdii a grant to prepare a full proposal for a Regional training Centre for Social and Emotional Well-Being. Consultants were contracted and then worked on the proposal for twelve months.

During the proposal development stage, key stakeholders from the region were interviewed extensively over some twelve months. There were workshops to develop the agreed management model. The details of the model are outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

The MOU

The MOU was developed and signed off by all members of the Community Consultative Group. The MOU outlines:

- the agreed purpose of the Centre
- the parties to the agreement and their roles
- principles of operation for the Centre, on which future management decisions will be made
- the structure of the Centre
- membership and operation of the CCG and
- the management and decision making process.

It was recognised that this model may change once the Centre is operating successfully. A process for making such changes is outlined in the MOU (MOU is as attachment).

Who are the CCG?

The organisations, geographic areas and individuals represented on the CCG are as follows (all have one representative unless otherwise stated):

- Bidjerdii Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Corporation
Community Health Service Central Queensland Region (2 representatives)
- Darumbal Community Youth Service Inc.
- Darumbal Traditional Owners Corporation Pty Ltd
- Murri Gundoos Alternative Justice Program
- Juwarki Kapu-Lug Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation
- Q.E.C. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service
- Central Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency
- Darumbal Noolar Murri Corporation
- Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council
- Queensland Health (2 representatives)
- Aboriginal and Islander Community Resource Agency (AICRA)
- Central Queensland regional area
- Torres Strait Islands
- Other individuals with appropriate skills and experience

Further time was taken to agree on when meetings would be, nominating a chairperson of the CCG, seeking regional representatives and looking at staffing needs and timelines.

Region

The region the Central Queensland Regional Centre for Social and Emotional Well-Being will cover will be in line with the geographic areas that a number of departments and agencies utilise, e.g. the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care. The Central Queensland Regional Training Centre for Social and Emotional Well-Being originally covered only the ATSIC boundaries for Central Queensland. This area covers from Rockhampton west to Winton and surrounding areas (10 hours west of Rockhampton by car) and then cuts inland across and down to Maryborough (5 hours south of Rockhampton by car). This area was extended in May, 2001 and now includes the Mackay region, which extends (4 hours by car) to the north of Rockhampton.

Regional Centre Staff

Regional Centre staff have now been employed for some 6 weeks. It is now August 2001. It has taken two years since we were first thinking about such a Centre.

Coordinator

Responsible for the day to day management of the Centre and its staff, reporting to Bidgerdii and the CCG, overseeing the establishment of reporting, administration and marketing systems, data gathering and analysis, applying for Registered Training Authority status, networking and developing industry linkages, financial administration (with Bidgerdii staff), seeking funding from other sources and business planning.

Trainer

Responsible for assisting with the reporting, administration and marketing systems, designing and delivering (with the Psychologist) the basic and advanced training courses, gathering and analysing data on community needs and effectiveness of training and general administration relating to conducting training programs.

Psychologist

Responsible for designing and delivering (with the Trainer) the basic and advanced courses. Also for designing and delivering support programs.

Administration and Marketing Officer

Responsible for establishing financial and administration systems, designing and delivering the marketing program, the marketing program for the Centre and its courses, developing marketing materials for the basic and advanced courses, data gathering and analysis, developing interagency cooperation and general administration.

Regional Centre Objectives

1. Development of innovative curricula and/or adoption of curricula from other Regional Centres, delivery of appropriate training or purchase/contracting of training
2. Development and testing of models for cross sector linkages and interagency cooperation
3. Provision of personal and professional support to health workers
4. Development of information systems to clarify the level of need in the region and to test the efficacy of existing services and existing/proposed training

The Central Queensland Regional Training Centre for Social and Emotional Well-Being has decided that it will concentrate as a priority on objective number one. The Centre is aware that it will need to ensure that the training programs offered through the Centre:

are culturally safe

are culturally appropriate

include both accredited and non-accredited programs

incorporate the National Framework for Reform of Training Principles such as competency based training, recognition of prior learning, multiple entry and exit points and flexible delivery

are designed so that learners with low literacy levels will not be disadvantaged

incorporate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker National Competency Standards

To date the members of the CCG and other community members have articulated some of the training that they would like, we would like to see happening. There has been the suggestion for basic introduction to counselling courses, suggestions for training on issues such as family violence, sexual violence, men's issues, women's issues, understanding the mental health system and much more. People in the community are excited about the possibilities that the Regional Centre can offer. The changes it can lead to within communities.

The Process

The process of developing the Central Queensland Regional Training Centre for Social and Emotional Well-Being has been a steady one of talking, working through issues, being as open and as transparent to individuals and groups concerned, checking and re-checking and questioning ourselves. This has at times been difficult.

We could have jumped in and made a grab for the money way back in 1999, but what may have been achieved? Would we have contributed to further distress of ourselves as community members? Would it have contributed to our social and emotional well-being issues? In what way? Would it have worked as we are trying to make it work now? There are lessons here for governments too, as they are often the ones who release monies and urge community groups to apply for the monies without being able to work through processes fully. If we were able to work through processes fully at times, we may see much better outcomes, coordinated outcomes and agreed outcomes for community, with community. Changes that we know, believe and strive for as individuals and as collectives. Not witness us trying to jump hoops to get the dollar to try and make changes for ourselves.

It is believed we have tried to work in a good way. That we have taken care and undertaken a process of considered thought. We will continue to try and work like this in the future. We know that it will not be easy and we will need to remain open, be prepared to talk, to continue to check and re-check, question ourselves and each other.

We know that we were once empowered strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We know that we need to work on our issues of Social and Emotional Well-Being to be collectively empowered peoples again. We believe that the Central Queensland Regional Training Centre for Social and Emotional Well-Being is making steps and will make steps towards us achieving this reality.

Presenter

Bronwyn Fredericks is an Aboriginal woman from South-East Queensland. She is the Chairperson of the Bidjerdii Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Corporation Community Health Service Central Queensland Region and has served on the Board for the past 6 years. Bidjerdii is a key organisation behind the Central Queensland Regional Training Centre for Social and Emotional Well-Being. Bronwyn has worked as an educator within schools, TAFE and university levels of education. Worked as a project worker and community worker in the education and health fields for numerous years along with undertaking consultant work. Bronwyn holds a Dip.Teaching (Sec.), B.Educ, M.Educ-Leadership, M.Educ.Studies and is presently completing a Phd in Health Science at Central Queensland University.